

FEB 26 1962

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SECRECY EXPLORED — The question of government secrecy and the role of the free press was debated as part of a two-day parley at Wesleyan over the weekend. Here Allen Dulles, second from left, gives his views as Prof. Paul Hammond, left, David Fisk, student moderator, and Prof. Joseph Tussman listen. Douglass Cater, an editor of The Reporter, who with Dulles was a main speaker at the conference, is pictured at right.

Experts Agree

See No Laws Necessary To Restrain the Press

By S. C. BEINHORN

Government secrecy and the free press, a cold war topic given full breath by the President after the Cuban invasion failure, was the subject of a two-day parley at Wesleyan University this weekend.

The principal speakers were Allen Dulles, former director of the Central Intelligence Agency and Douglass Cater, an editor of The Reporter Magazine.

Both men agreed that the need for restraints against the press existed and that something should be done. They were less certain what these restraints should be.

They were not, however, that the restraints should not be in the form of a law, as was suggested by Wesleyan Professors

Joseph Tussman and Paul Hammond. Why not a law curbing the press, these men asked. Dulles and Cater put up a stiff fight.

"I don't know how you would phrase the law," the former spy chief said.

"The word they always boggie on is 'knowingly,'" Cater chipped in. Whether a newsman "knowingly" reveals secrets is the key. Dulles had indicated earlier that many times the press divulges sensitive information simply because it does not know it is sensitive.

Opposed to Law

Tussman persisted that the drafting of legislation was a "bad idea" because the press would not give. Later he said, "I am constitutionally opposed to en-



DOUGLASS CATER
... No curbing laws

...this into a study. He pointed out that the secrecy vs. free press problem is still in the early stage of the study. He said that at this point it would be impossible to draft a law that would clearly define responsible and irresponsible reporting.

Cater and Dulles opened the parley Saturday with speeches, Dulles leading off in the afternoon. He declared that the Russians gain much useful information about government secrets simply by reading the newspapers. Dulles suggested that the publicity restrictions of war time should be applied in a limited way.

Cater, speaking in the evening, also stated that newspapers disclosed information that tends to breach the security barrier. He proposed that a "council of elders," composed of senior newsmen, decide which sensitive news be printed.

Sunday in Nicholson Lounge he declared that it was also time for some one high in the executive branch of government to begin to say how much sensitive news can be told and how fast.

The backdrop to all this was President Kennedy's appeal to the press of mid-April, 1961.

Examine Responsibility

"I am asking the members of the newspaper profession and the industry in this country to examine their own responsibilities -- to consider the degree and the nature of the present danger -- and to heed the duty of self-restraint which that danger imposes upon us all. Every newspaper now asks itself, with respect to every story: 'Is it news? All I suggest is that you add the question: Is it in the interest of national security?'"

The President got nowhere and Cater himself wrote in July of that year:

"A self-deputized group of editors and publishers called on Mr. Kennedy to inquire what he had in mind. They emerged an hour later to assure reporters that there was no need at this time for any kind of voluntary machinery. Did they agree with Mr. Kennedy that there was need for self-restraint? The group's spokesman, Felix McKnight, editor of the Dallas Times Herald and president of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, answered, 'Any responsible editor faces that news judgment every day.'"

Much of what came up in the parley was developed in the Cater article of July.

For the reporter in Washington there is a note of unreality about much of the outcry over secrecy. It ignores the method and motivation by which secrets leak out. . . . News does happen in our form of government before it tidily crosses the President's desk. Policies and programs being fought out frequently depend on the news that can stimulate political support. This is the way our government works and will probably

continue to be a part of the life of national peril," he wrote.

News Leaks

The problem of news leaks, of the use of the press by congressmen to blackjack the executive and to blackjack each other were thrashed by the forum.

Tussman, a professor of philosophy, noted another problem in limiting the press range. The press, he contended, is intended as an extension of public education and is the "last resort" free enterprise. He stated, too, that the idea of "secrets" in an age of nuclear overkill is a 19th century reflex.

Also arguing against restraint, Cater indicated, is the traditional competitiveness of the press, the daily battle to beat the other fellow. Asked why it was that the press needed to get the news before it happened, Cater said, "mores." He said he never saw it proved that this kind of journalism sold more papers than the kind that fully and rationally developed stories after the news happened. Hammond suggested that the press this way might be able to change government policy. Cater seems to agree, but he said he might also be looking at the problem from the view of a magazine man, who does not have to meet the daily deadline.

Proper Perspective

"It takes a magazine article to come along and beat the news in proper perspective," he said finally.

Dulles, at the outset, said he was opposed to a government censor, that he would like to see the government say which information areas are areas of vulnerability.

"I wouldn't suggest the government go much further than that."

Cater proposed his council of elders, more information from the top, increased press criticism of the press, which would be a tremendous departure from the present and past and the development of a new sense of values for press.

Writing in July he said:

"The solution lies more in stimulating a sense of realization among reporters and more particularly among editors, that the decision to publish news affecting national security should be based on a higher standard than what is referred to as 'news judgment.' Even responsible reporters are tempted to go the limit when there is no disapprobation for the irresponsible. Disclosure that are at first shocking become accepted as common practice. Precautions considered normal when dealing with local news situations--no editor would prematurely expose police efforts to capture a kidnapper--are lightly abandoned when dealing with national news."

The forum yesterday indicated that this solution and all others are still far away.